CECW-PA 15 AUG 1991

MEMORANDUM FOR MAJOR SUBORDINATE COMMANDS AND DISTRICT COMMANDS

SUBJECT: Policy Guidance Letter No. 29, Expenditures on Aesthetics at Civil Works Projects

1. References:

a. ER 1105-2-100, Planning Guidance.
b. EM 1110-2-38, Environmental Quality in Design of Civil Works Projects.
c. EM 1110-2-301, Landscape Planting at Floodwalls, Levees and Embankment Dams.
d. EM 1110-2-1205, Environmental Engineering for Local Flood Control Channels.
e. EM 1110-2-1202, Environmental Engineering for Deep-Draft Navigation Projects.
f. EM 1110-2-1204, Environmental Engineering for Coastal Shore Protection.

2. Background: Incorporating environmental quality into project design, including consideration of the visual quality of the project, continues to be an important goal of the Civil Works program. References 1a. through 1f. provide guidance for assessing the aesthetic impacts of Civil Works projects, avoiding or minimizing aesthetic impacts, and planning and designing projects to make positive contributions to aesthetic quality. This guidance continues to be applicable. However, reasonableness must also be applied in defining the appropriate level of expenditures for aesthetic quality at Civil Works projects. Current budgetary constraints and the intense competition for Federal funds dictate a greater level of discipline in meeting our responsibilities to harmoniously blend projects with the surrounding environment while avoiding excessive expenditures.

3. Policy: The following principles should be applied in defining the appropriate measures for aesthetic quality at Civil Works projects in all stages of project development.

a. Project Relationship. Any aesthetic project features must be related to harmoniously blending the project into the project setting and not aimed at “beautifying” the surrounding area. This is not at issue with measures that are integral to project design but is an important consideration for measures that are not integral. For example, plant materials can be used to reduce visual contrast or screen projects. Landscape plantings must be limited to the land required for the project and plantings will not extend to adjacent property even if the adjacent property is a public park or recreation area.

b. Project Setting. The acceptability and compatibility of aesthetic features of project design are affected by the project setting and the expectation of the users and viewers of the project. The land use in the area surrounding the project is an important consideration in determining the appropriate measures for aesthetics. For example, a concrete channel without aesthetic treatment may not be visually objectionable in a heavy industrial area but a concrete channel in a residential area may require texturing and screening with

trees and shrubs to be visually compatible with the residential land use. Linear projects such as levees and channels may incorporate different aesthetic features in different reaches of the same project, depending on the visual qualities and land uses of the adjacent property in that reach, with an appropriately designed transition between different treatment reaches.

c. Partnership. Project aesthetic features will be closely coordinated with the non-Federal project sponsor. The objectives, goals, desires and values of the local sponsor will be carefully considered in formulating the aesthetic features of the project within the limits of a uniform application of standard Corps practices for aesthetic quality, as defined in references 1b. through lf. and this policy guidance letter. A summary of standard Corps practice is enclosed for reference. This does not preclude the incorporation of measures into a project that would exceed the standard Corps practice if the non-Federal sponsor is willing to bear all of the incremental costs of such measures as elements of a locally preferred plan. Equity is also an important consideration in working in partnership with local sponsors. The preservation and enhancement of aesthetic quality must be an important goal in all projects, regardless of the socioeconomic conditions in the project area.

d. Compatibility. All aesthetic measures must be designed so that they are fully compatible with the project purpose and in no way compromise the safety, integrity or function of the project. For example, it may be appropriate to screen a floodwall with vegetative plantings but it would be inappropriate to plant trees directly on a levee that might endanger its structural integrity or diminish its hydraulic characteristics.

e. Cost Allocation. Costs for aesthetic measures that are in accordance with standard Corps practices are shared as project costs. Cost allocation would be an issue in multi-purpose projects where aesthetic costs would be shared in accordance with the purpose to which the costs are allocated. The addition of recreation as a project purpose may introduce the need for an increased consideration of aesthetics since it results in increased public visibility and use of the project. An example would be a hiking trail on a flood control levee. In these cases, any incremental aesthetic costs associated with the recreation purpose should be allocated to the recreation purpose and cost-shared with the non-Federal sponsor on a 50 percent basis.

f. Definition in the Feasibility Stage. Project measures to preserve and restore aesthetic quality should be fully defined (i.e., described and displayed) in the feasibility report with engineering appendix and reflected in the project cost estimate. The report should include a description of the project setting and the relationship of aesthetic features of the project to the setting (see paragraph 3b.). To the extent practical, all the incremental costs of the project aesthetic features should be identified, recognizing that some aesthetic considerations are completely integral to the project design and are not separable. This complete description and display of costs will allow any issues on the reasonableness of the aesthetic measures to be addressed prior to project authorization and be reflected in the authorizing document. Increases in levels of project costs for aesthetics during pre- construction engineering and design, beyond inflation, will not

be approved.

4. The policy contained in this letter will be incorporated into references Ia. through lf. as they are updated.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Encl ARTHUR E. WILLIAMS
Major General, USA
Director of Civil Works

DISTRIBUTION:
(see page 5)

Standard Corps Practice for Aesthetics as Defined by Existing Regulations Structures - Neat clean lines and uncluttered appearance. Particular attention to location of safety railings, fencing, machinery and equipment layouts, power and communication lines, poles and appurtenances. Harsh appearance in form subdued by use of architectural techniques, landscape plantings or both. Artistic use of color, material selection, texture and combinations and variation in forming. Concrete finishes appropriate for the structure and its viewability by the public. Housing machinery and other equipment in architecturally-pleasing structures or shrouds. Care in paint color and preservative coatings. Consideration of concrete walls, parapets topped with railings or metal railings instead of chain link fencing. Screening unsightly areas with landscape plantings.

Flood Control Projects

Urban Levees - Consideration of alignment shifts to avoid visual impacts. Grading, contouring, seeding and tree planting for borrow and waste areas. Landscape-planting along the length of the levee off the basic structure or on overbuilt areas.

Rural Levees - Grading, contouring, seeding and tree planting for borrow and waste areas. Landscape plantings at pumping installations, public road crossings, and near residences.

Concrete Floodwalls and Concrete Channels - Concrete texturing and formed patterns. Concrete coloration and staining of grout. Use of gabions. Consideration of gentle curves in alignment. Use of wood or vinyl-clad safety fencing in natural colors. Blending fencing into the setting. Landscape plantings at streets, near residences, at street crossings, in parks, in commercial areas and other areas of high visibility.

Earth Channels - Use of vegetation and natural materials (gravel, cobbles, etc.) to preserve natural appearance. Preservation of vegetation. Water based construction or construction front single side of stream to avoid impacts. Consideration of gentle curves in alignment. Landscape plantings as appropriate.

Dams - Plantings in areas adjacent to embankments. Planting of flood tolerant species in flood control pool areas. Guidance on structures also applies to dams.

Deep Draft Navigation - Topographic modifications by placement and grading of dredged material. Planting of trees and shrubs.

Beach Nourishment - Use of transition fill rather than hard structures to merge with natural shoreline. Use of fill material visually compatible with existing beach. Avoidance of groin fields. Building dunes to conform to natural contours. Consideration of dune grass plantings.